NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6005 JULY 18, 1978
JOHN ROBERTS/KHARTOUM

O.A.U. -- FOREIGN INTERVENTION

ANNCR:

AFRICAN HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT TODAY (JULY 18) BEGIN THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL SUMMIT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY (OAU). AND, AS WE HEAR IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM VOA'S JOHN ROBERTS IN KHARTOUM, THE MEETING IS TAKING PLACE AT A TIME OF UNPRECEDENTED CONCERN OVER FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT IN AFRICAN AFFAIRS.

VOICE:

ALL O.A.U. MEMBERS SEEM AGREED THAT FOREIGN INTERVENTION IS A BAD THING. BUT BEYOND THAT, THERE IS SHARP DISAGREEMENT OVER WHAT IT IS, WHO IS RESPONSIBLE, AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT. FOCUS OF FREQUENTLY ACRIMONIOUS DEBATE WAS ON THE MORE THAN FORTY THOUSAND CUBAN TROOPS DEPLOYED IN THIRTEEN AFRICAN COUNTRIES, AND THE ESTIMATED NINE THOUSAND FRENCH FORCES IN SEVEN COUNTRIES.

THE SO-CALLED PROGRESSIVES LED BY ALGERIA AND LIBYA HAVE ATTACKED THE FRENCH POSITION AS NEO-COLONIALISM AND IMPERIALISM, AND THEY DEFEND THE CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA AND ETHIOPIA AS HELP IN REPELLING EXTERNAL AGGRESSION. THE SO-CALLED MODERATES, WITH MOROCCO, SENEGAL, AND EGYPT AS THEIR CHIEF SPOKESMAN, SAY THAT SOVIET AND CUBAN PRESENCE IS AN EVEN WORSE FORM OF NEO-COLONIALISM AND A THREAT TO AFRICA'S INDEPENDENCE.

FOR THE PAST SEVEN DAYS, THE FOREIGN MINISTERS CHEWED ON THIS PROBLEM APPROACHING IT FROM FOUR DIFFERENT ANGLES, ALL OF WHICH WERE ON THE AGENDA. THEY ARE PROPOSALS FOR ESTABLISHING A PAN-AFRICAN DEFENSE FORCE, NEO-COLONIALIST ACTIVITIES, FOREIGN INTERVENTION AND STRENGTHENING THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT. THEY

PRODUCED DRAFT RESOLUTIONS WHICH TEND TO RESTATE PREVIOUS O.A.U. DECLARATIONS, SUCH AS THE RIGHT OF MEMBERS TO CALL ON ANYBODY THEY CHOOSE FOR HELP IN REPELLING AGGRESSION, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, SAYING THAT THE DEFENSE OF AFRICA SHOULD BE IN AFRICAN HANDS AND SO FORTH.

CRITICAL REFERENCES TO THE EAST OR WEST OR SPECIFICALLY TO CUBA AND FRANCE REPORTEDLY HAVE BEEN DELETED. THESE RESOLUTIONS ARE DELIBERATELY VAGUE AND AMBIGUOUS, NEITHER OFFENDING NOR PLEASING ANYBODY, AND PERMITTING WIDE INTERPRETATION. THIS IS A TIME-HONORED FORMULA ADOPTED IN MANY INTERNATINAL FORUMS FOR AVOIDING OUTRIGHT BREAKS AND PRESERVING THE FACE OF UNITY.

THE FIFTEENTH O.A.U. SUMMIT IS LIKELY TO INCLUDE SOME LIVELY DEBATE ON FOREIGN INTERVENTION, BUT FEW OBSERVERS BELIEVE THERE WILL BE MUCH PUBLIC AIRING OF THE DISPUTE AT THE END. THERE IS ALSO THE MEMORY OF THE SPECIAL SUMMIT HELD OVER TWO YEARS AGO IN ADDIS ABABA ON THE ANGOLAN PROBLEM, WHICH WAS SPURRED BY CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN THAT COUNTRY'S CIVIL WAR. THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE O.A.U. SPLIT EXACTLY DOWN THE MIDDLE OVER THE ISSUE, AND THE SUMMIT BROKE UP WITHOUT EVEN ISSUING A COMMUNIQUE. ALTHOUGH THAT DIVISION IS STILL WITH THE O.A.U. TODAY IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT FEW MEMBERS WANT A REPETITION OF THE ADDIS ABABA EXPERIENCE.

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JS/RTD